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AERA 2019, Toronto

Mon, April 8, 12:20 to 1:50pm, Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel, Second Floor, Civic Ballroom North

Symposium Title

Exploring Lived Experiences through Multimodal Texts and Methodologies: Narratives and Complex Representations of Learning

Symposium Abstract

This session explores how multimodal narratives allow for complex, nuanced representations of lived experiences. The papers illustrate how composing and sharing multimodal, digital media texts provide opportunities for students and teachers to explore connections between large, often abstract concepts, such as play, climate change, and mathematical concepts, and more grounded, intimate daily experiences. The participants in this international and multidisciplinary session demonstrate how the use of video, image, sound, and print together affords researchers and participants more complex representations of lived experience and culture by putting into conversation, and sometimes conflict, a range of human expression and experiences that to move beyond “discrete and disconnected facts” to narratives that are empowering and inclusive.

Symposium Summary

Objectives: This session explores the ways in which multimodal narratives allow for complex, nuanced representations of lived experiences. Participants address how composing and sharing multimodal, digital media texts provides opportunities for students and teachers to explore connections between large and often abstract concepts, such as play, climate change, and mathematical concepts, and more grounded, intimate daily experiences. The symposium participants, all experienced multimodal researchers, demonstrate how the use of video, image, sound, and print together affords researchers, students, and teachers ways of communicating the combinations of word, gesture, and text that comprise the wider range of communicative practices in daily living. Such narratives provide layered and complicated representations of knowledge and learning that are often overlooked in quantitative data. In addition, the presentation raises possibilities for how such approaches can facilitate perceptions of agency among both students and teachers, connecting their experiences to broader concepts and ideas in the culture at large. The symposium will include significant time for discussion.

Overview: The symposium covers four qualitative research projects that address multiple disciplines and include participants from three countries. Each presentation shows how multimodal narratives can complicate, even push against, conventional ideas about learning that can dominate the media and culture. The first presentation explores how, in research on the nature of children’s play, multimodal narratives enable children to work alongside researchers to explore the lived experience of their play, its cultural repertoires, and media-related resonance. The second presentation demonstrates how lower secondary students creating videos with their

smartphones to explain solving equations in math connect their school work to out-of-school experiences and contexts. The third paper illustrates how the creation and sharing of multimodal texts such as videos and podcasts by middle school students in different countries can help foster a greater understanding of climate change as both global and local. The fourth paper analyzes assessment practices in early childhood education, exploring the ways in which educators may use digital tools to create multimodal narratives that represent children’s learning in new ways.

Scholarly or scientific significance: The presentations in this symposium all work toward responding to the conference theme of using multimodal narratives to move beyond “discrete and disconnected facts” to instead represent lived experiences in ways that are “empowering and inclusive.” Too often, the data that are presumed to be most persuasive, in research and in larger cultural conversations about education, are often quantitative and print-based. Multimodal texts and methodologies allow for more complex representations of lived experience by putting into conversation, and sometimes conflict, a range of human expression and experiences, through combinations of video, image, sound, and print (Kress 2011; Jewitt 2013; Jewitt 2014). In this symposium we demonstrate such texts can create bridges across ages, concepts, and cultures that enhance the understanding of both those composing and those interpreting the texts. In addition, we demonstrate how the ability to represent experience through multimodal approaches has implications for perceptions of agency and for broadening perceptions of how learning takes place in and out of classroom settings.

Structure of the session

90 minutes of presentations and discussion as follows: General introduction to the symposium (5 minutes) 4 paper presentations (15 minutes each) Interactive discussion (25 Minutes)

Paper 1: Researching children’s media-related play: Multimodal narratives of lived experience

Presenters: Dr John Potter and Dr Kate Cowan, UCL IOE, UK

This paper presents our findings in a project exploring children’s playground games in which the players themselves, aged between 7 and 11, were engaged as co-researchers, using a range of digital and other media. The purpose was to find ways to explore and represent contemporary play in the new media age and to look for continuities and differences with playground games of the past 50 years.

The theoretical frames employed in the work combine, amongst others, multimodality, new literacies, play theory and media literacy (Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Burn & Richards, 2014; Gee, 2015; Marsh, 2004). The data presented is drawn from an ongoing two-year UK research council funded study, *Playing the Archive*, conducted by UCL Institute of Education and the University of Sheffield. The overarching aims were twofold: to explore childhood play in the digital age and to offer a contemporary lens on an earlier archive of children’s games (Opie & Opie, 1954; Willett, Richards, Marsh, Burn, & Bishop, 2013). **Methods** We drew on existing and emergent methods and methodologies, including those derived from theories of multimodality, focused ethnography, democratising and participant research (Fielding, 2004; Jewitt, 2011; Knoblauch, 2005; Kress, 2003). Children were engaged as coresearchers using tools such as wearable GoPro cameras, iPads and handheld voice recorders, alongside pen and paper. Our methods were thoroughly evaluated by the university ethics committee and we rigorously adhered to principles of fully informed consent from parents, carers and children, as well as mandatory data protection, throughout. **Data** We worked with a core team of 15 child researchers in each of two school playgrounds in urban, multiracial settings; both schools had in the region of 400 children enrolled. The datasets comprised video clips of various kinds, audio recordings, maps of playspaces created by the children and more. We researched their contemporary play and responses to items in the games archive, including their re-enactment of games from the past. Several emergent themes were coded across the datasets using multimodal analysis. **Findings** Our findings show that media-rich methods of both data collection and analysis enabled children and academic researchers to create detailed multimodal narrative

accounts of contemporary play. We have witnessed how games played in our research settings are remediating popular cultural reference points, such as those derived from gaming and YouTube, alongside unpacking continuities with childhoods of the past. We have data which speaks back to concerns around screen-based play by showing that physical play is alive and well in playgrounds and that children are agentive and active authors of their own remediation of digital culture.

Significance This work is significant because it shows how multimodal narratives, developed by and with child researchers, allow us to pay attention to the detail of children's lived experience, something which is absent in larger-scale quantitative work. This project, with its emphasis on meaning-making across modes of gesture, movement, image and speech affords us richer understandings of contemporary childhoods, communication and play in the digital age.

Paper 2: Math, multimodality and moving images: the making of new educational chronotopes

Presenter: Dr Øystein Gilje, University of Oslo, Norway

In mathematics education, most of the data provided by pupils stems from national and international tests, as well as quantitative analysis of large data sets. At the same time there is an interest in talking about mathematics in order to increase students' understanding and motivation. This talk builds on qualitative studies of social interaction that demonstrate how students talk about solving equations in an assignment where they used their own phones, laptops, and other digital devices to make a multimodal text (a short instructional film).

Rooted in ethnography and new literacy studies, this study examines the complexity of meaning making across a wide range of literacy and numeracy practices. The analysis pays attention to how young people develop multimodal texts as mediating artefacts in collaborative practices, and use them to negotiate knowledge and literacy. Drawing on video data of social interaction, the boundary objects of the phones provide a lens through which to understand the organization of numeracy and literacy in time and space, what is termed as an educational chronotope (Ritella & Ligorio, 2016). This type of analytical lens allows us to ask and rephrase the question in the communicative model of social semiotics: Who does what kind of (aesthetic and) semiotic work and for whom is the work done? (Kress, 2010, p. 34).

The data in the project stem from a three-year ethnography in four, lower-secondary classrooms, including nearly 100 pupils. The project has university ethics board approval. The data in this presentation is from one of several projects in mathematics education. The unit of analysis is students talk and interaction around the phones while recording their films. A specific focus is on the viewfinder/screen in their mobile phones as boundary objects (Edwards, 2009), and their use of the phone in the boundary-crossing activities in educational chronotopes.

The findings illustrate how students use the viewfinder when filming, as well as graphics, fonts, and special effects in their editing of multimodal texts in math education. In this way the findings raise questions around agency, authorship and curation when working with digital devices in order to make a multimodal text. The findings in this project illustrate how multimodal texts and methodologies allow for more complex representations of a challenging task in math as a lived experience by producing a multimodal text. In this way when pupils are given the opportunity to work on their own projects, we see that doing so enables them to use skills acquired in learning contexts other than school.

The findings described in this article can help teachers to understand how students can work with personal digital devices in new and innovative ways, and by that expanding the educational chronotope in and outside of school.

Paper 3: Making climate change matter: Exploring local-global experiences through multimodal narratives

Presenter: Bronwyn T. Williams, University of Louisville, USA

While weather is experienced as a local, daily phenomenon, media reports and textbook descriptions can make climate change seem distant, abstract, and unlikely to lead to the behavioural change and political action needed to address this crucial issue. Engaging young people with the lived experiences of others around the world can help them understand climate change in both local and global contexts as well as increase empathy with students across cultures. This presentation draws from an ongoing science education project to help middle school students from around the world understanding the lived experiences of climate change through the composing and sharing of multimodal texts.

This multidisciplinary, action research project involves schools and students in the US, the Philippines, and South Africa and will eventually include schools in four other countries. Multimodal narratives provide a way of exploring the relationship between abstract ideas influence lived experiences (Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010) and allow student authors to juxtapose materials from multiple disciplines in ways that enhance the representation of complex concepts such as climate change (Shipka, 2011). Finally, multimodal texts can be useful in connecting writers and readers across cultures (Kim, 2016).

Students investigate the physical, economic, social, cultural, and political impacts of climate change in their communities and share their insights through multimodal, digital texts and collaborations with partners in other countries. Students compose videos, blogs, and podcasts to represent what they have learned of their local experiences. Student projects include measuring and comparing their schools' carbon footprints, comparing local media coverage of climate change, and interviewing family and community members about their experiences and conceptions of climate change.

The analysis focuses on literacy practices in the multimodal narratives composed by the students in the U.S., Philippines, and South Africa. The data also include classroom observations and interviews with students. The project has necessary IRB and ethics board approvals.

The composing of the texts allows the students to reflect on the connections between the science of climate change and their lived experiences and compare their understanding with those in other countries. Also, the students gain an increased understanding of how to communicate their experiences to an audience from outside their culture. The responses from students in other schools helped students gain a broader perspective on relationships between science and culture.

Proponents of climate change education (Beach, Share, & Webb, 2017; Shepardson, Roychoudhury, & Hirsch, 2017) often emphasize the role of science-based evidence in working with students. Though science is obviously crucial to such education, other research (Callison, 2014; Eubanks, 2015) illustrates that, in a post-truth era of media and politics, scientific evidence by itself is not always enough to shape students' understanding. Instead, local cultural perceptions of both science and traditions of authority are also essential in shaping how communities understand and respond

to these issues. Multimodal narratives of lived experiences provide both the opportunity to explore the interanimating relationships between science, culture, and literacy, both at home and around the world.

Paper 4: Valuing Learning through Multimodal Narratives: Observation and Digital Documentation of Play in English Kindergartens

Presenters: Dr Rosie Flewitt & Dr Kate Cowan, UCL IOE, UK

In early childhood education, observations of play have typically been documented in paperbased formats (e.g. scrapbooks, written notes, printed photographs) as part of assessment practices. However, there is a growing trend towards the use of commercial software to record learning in digital formats, where video, audio, photographs and writing can be combined. These multi-media forms of 'digital documentation' are significantly different to traditional paper-based practices. They offer the potential to create multimodal narratives that represent children's multiple signs of learning in new ways, and the possibility to share these narratives with parents and children themselves. Yet the current lack of research-based guidance regarding digital documentation risks practices being shaped by commercial drivers rather than by child-centred learning theories. Framework Drawing upon a multimodal social semiotic perspective on learning (Bezemer & Kress, 2016; Kress 2010;), this presentation will report the findings of a one-year project funded by the Froebel Trust. The research worked with educators to develop an early childhood pedagogy of observation, documentation and assessment that brings Froebelian principles of the 'uniqueness of every child's capacity and potential' and 'holistic nature of development' to documentation practices in contemporary kindergartens (Lilley, 1967).

Fieldwork included case studies of children aged 3-5 years living with disadvantage and/or in the early stages of learning English in three diverse multicultural kindergartens in London. The study was reviewed and approved by the university ethics committee at the outset. A multimodal methodology (Jewitt 2014), underpinned by elements of ethnography (Kress 2011), was used to offer multiple perspectives on the day-to-day lived experiences of observation and documentation.

Video recordings, examples of documentation, interviews with educators, parent questionnaires and video-prompted discussions with children provided diverse insights into observation and digital documentation in practice. Thematic analysis across the dataset and fine-grained multimodal analysis of video extracts have resulted in rich findings regarding the opportunities and constraints of different approaches to the observation and documentation of young children's learning.

Recognising that children's learning through play is often expressed in subtle ways, through silent actions and interactions as well as through language, this research highlights the potentials and constraints of practitioners' diverse approaches to observing and documenting play in contemporary kindergartens. The findings draw attention to which signs of learning are typically privileged in early childhood education, and which aspects of children's learning often/may pass unnoticed and undocumented. Significance The study highlights the insights multimodal narratives can offer into children's lived experiences, whilst recognising a number of challenges presented by digital documentation. The study argues for respectful use of observation and digital documentation which values all children's subtle signs of learning, at a time when early years assessment worldwide is under particular debate.

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